

Prompt and easy access to services to address these problems determines a veteran's ability to recover from them.

For example, according to research conducted by the VA, veterans who received care soon after the end of their service had lower levels of PTSD upon a follow-up evaluation a year after they initiated care. According to the study, for each year that a veteran waited to initiate treatment, there was about a 5 percent increase in the odds of their PTSD either not improving or worsening.

In 2018, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine found that post-9/11 veterans who had not sought VA mental health care didn't know how to apply for benefits—or were unsure whether they were even eligible. Some didn't know what services the VA offered or felt that they didn't deserve care even if they could get it.

This bill addresses that problem by making grants available to states to help the thousands of veterans who need services for their conditions acquired or exacerbated by military service but who don't know how to access them.

This legislation will not only be key to assisting veterans to get over barriers to access their benefits but will also improve veteran mental health and help reduce the veteran suicide crisis.

This bill focuses on equity by prioritizing grants to areas with high suicide rates among veterans and high referrals to the Veterans Crisis Line. This approach will help save veterans' lives and ensure this funding is directed to areas most in need.

Smoother access to VA mental health care and suicide prevention has never been more important than it is today. A disproportionate number of veterans die by suicide following separation from military service.

Veterans ages 18 to 34 have the highest rate of suicide.

As reported by the Houston Chronicle, in 2020, the suicide rate for Texas veterans was 36.6 suicides per 100,000 veterans while the nationwide rate was 34.4, according to data from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs. This rate is in stark contrast to the suicide rate among Texans overall, which is 13.3 per 100,000 people.

I am proud to support this legislation because it will reduce veteran suicide among Texans and nationwide, and it will enable states to better serve veterans who are in need of many types of assistance.

This is especially important because of the Texas governor's recent actions impacting troops and veterans in Texas with regard to the southern border.

Texas's governor has thrust our National Guard into a disastrous border operation, Operation Lone Star, by declaring a fictional "migrant invasion", and falsely claiming that activation of the National Guard is needed for what he describes as "secure our communities against record-breaking illegal border crossings and transnational criminal activity."

The result is that our National Guard troops are being forced to commit major human rights violations. The governor's use of the National Guard to police misdemeanor trespassing by migrants has sparked a civil rights probe by the Justice Department. According to Human Rights Watch, the operation results in arrests that target people based on race and national origin and disregard due process, including abuses in detention.

Black and Brown migrants, and even US citizens, are subjected to racially discriminatory arrests, prosecutions on flimsy pretenses, and detention with substandard food and inadequate or nonexistent health care, according to detainees cited in a complaint filed with the US Justice Department. Defendants have been forced to wait weeks or months in pre-trial detention before they have an opportunity to see a judge.

Troops commanded to carry out this operation are so affected that at least four confirmed suicides have occurred since the operation began, while ten soldiers linked to the operation have died since September 2021, all via accident or suicide.

In addition to human rights abuses, Texas Guard troops have complained about pay problems, poor living conditions and inconsistent guidance from leaders since the operation expanded massively last Fall.

I strongly denounce the program, its abuses, and the trauma that it is inflicting on our troops who are charged to carry out the program's edicts.

This legislation, H.R. 4601, will help these veterans who struggle with the aftermath of the psychological and physical toll of serving on this operation, just as veterans of combat in Afghanistan and Iraq and elsewhere continue to wrestle with the aftereffects of their service.

We must help veterans access the benefits and services that they earned and so definitely deserve.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4601, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. GOOD of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

□ 1430

MARK O'BRIEN VA CLOTHING ALLOWANCE IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4772) to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the application and review process of the Department of Veterans Affairs for clothing allowance claims submitted by veterans, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4772

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Mark O'Brien VA Clothing Allowance Improvement Act".

SEC. 2. IMPROVEMENTS TO PROCESS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FOR CLOTHING ALLOWANCE CLAIMS.

(a) PROCESS FOR CLOTHING ALLOWANCE CLAIMS.—Section 1162 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by striking "The Secretary under" and inserting:

"(a) ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS.—The Secretary, under";

(2) in paragraph (2)—

(A) by striking "which (A) a physician" and inserting: "which—"

"(A) a physician"; and

(B) by striking "and (B) the Secretary" and inserting "and"; and

"(B) the Secretary"; and

(3) by adding at the end the following new subsections:

"(b) CONTINUOUS NATURE OF PAYMENTS.—Payments made to a veteran under subsection (a) shall continue on an automatically recurring annual basis until the earlier of the following:

"(1) The date on which the veteran elects to no longer receive such payments.

"(2) The date on which the Secretary determines the veteran no longer eligible pursuant to subsection (d).

"(c) REVIEWS OF CLAIM.—(1) Except as provided in paragraph (2)(B), the Secretary shall conduct reviews of the claim on which the clothing allowance is based to determine the continued eligibility of the veteran as follows:

"(A) Beginning not earlier than five years after the date on which a veteran initially receives a clothing allowance under this section and on a periodic basis thereafter.

"(B) Whenever the Secretary receives notice that the veteran no longer meets the requirements specified in subsection (a).

"(2)(A) The Secretary shall prescribe in regulations standards for determining whether a claim for clothing allowance is based on a circumstance that is not subject to change.

"(B) If the Secretary determines, pursuant to such standards, that a claim for clothing allowance is based on a circumstance that is not subject to change, paragraph (1)(A) shall not apply with respect to the claim.

"(d) DETERMINATION REGARDING CONTINUED ELIGIBILITY.—If the Secretary determines, as the result of a review of a claim conducted under subsection (c)(1), that the veteran who submitted such claim no longer meets the requirements specified in subsection (a), the Secretary shall—

"(1) provide to the veteran notice of such determination that includes a description of applicable actions that may be taken following the determination, including the actions specified in section 5104C of this title; and

"(2) discontinue the clothing allowance based on such claim."

(b) APPLICABILITY.—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall apply with respect to—

(1) claims for clothing allowance submitted on or after the date of the enactment of this Act; and

(2) claims for clothing allowance submitted prior to the date of the enactment of this Act, if the veteran who submitted such claim is in receipt of the clothing allowance as of the date of the enactment of this Act.

SEC. 3. ADJUSTMENTS OF CERTAIN LOAN FEES.

The loan fee table in section 3729(b)(2) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking "January 14, 2031" each place it appears and inserting "January 15, 2031".

SEC. 4. DETERMINATION OF BUDGETARY EFFECTS.

The budgetary effects of this Act, for the purpose of complying with the Statutory

Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010, shall be determined by reference to the latest statement titled "Budgetary Effects of PAYGO Legislation" for this Act, submitted for printing in the Congressional Record by the Chairman of the House Budget Committee, provided that such statement has been submitted prior to the vote on passage.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 4772, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4772, as amended, the Mark O'Brien VA Clothing Allowance Improvement Act.

As it stands today, under 38 U.S.C. 1162, the Secretary may pay an annual clothing allowance payment to a veteran with a service-connected disability that requires the use of a prosthetic or orthopedic appliance, including a wheelchair, which the Secretary determines tends to wear out or tear the clothing of the veteran, or medication which, A, a physician has prescribed for a skin condition, or, B, the Secretary determines causes irreparable damage to the veteran's outer garments.

Veterans who are entitled to a VA clothing allowance must reapply each year to receive the annual payment. This places the onus on veterans with what are, in most instances, permanent conditions to remember to reapply each year to receive the benefit they have already shown they are entitled to. Veterans must also remember to apply before August 1 or risk denial due to untimely application.

Mr. LEVIN's bill would change all of that. It would amend 38 U.S.C. 1162 to allow for the VA clothing allowance to be an automatic annual payment, subject to periodic review by VA to determine continued entitlement.

It would no longer force veterans to reapply each year and, instead, requires VA to complete periodic reviews to determine continued entitlement on its own initiation. This would require notice to the veteran if entitlement were no longer shown.

Approximately 40,000 veterans were approved for the clothing allowance benefit in fiscal year 2020 alone. This bill would ensure these veterans no longer have to reapply every year to maintain their benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly support this bill. I urge all of my colleagues to join me in supporting Mr.

LEVIN's beneficial and commonsense legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 4772, as amended, the Mark O'Brien VA Clothing Allowance Improvement Act.

The clothing allowance program was created to give veterans the financial means to replace clothes that have been damaged due to their service-connected disability. For example, a veteran who has a prosthetic or uses a wheelchair may wear out their clothes quickly and need to replace them often.

Yet, under current law, veterans who qualify for the clothing allowance must go through a tedious process of reapplying every year to receive their benefit, even if their condition is unlikely to change.

H.R. 4772, as amended, would streamline the process for veterans receiving a clothing allowance by making the renewal process automatic.

To ensure proper oversight of this program, VA would be required to reevaluate the veteran 5 years after they have received the benefit to determine eligibility for the clothing allowance. If a veteran has a more permanent condition, such as an amputation, VA would have the authority to exempt the veteran from regular reevaluations.

I support these commonsense changes, which would simplify the clothing allowance program and reduce the paperwork burden on our veterans, and I am glad to see the cost of the bill is also fully offset. I thank Congressman LEVIN and Congressman MOORE for their leadership on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, I urge all Members to support H.R. 4772, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I ask all of my colleagues to join me in passing H.R. 4772, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 4772, the Mark O'Brien VA Clothing Allowance Improvement Act.

This legislation would amend the VA's existing clothing allowance program by enabling automatic payments to continue being made to eligible veterans on a recurring basis until the veteran opts out of the program or is no longer eligible.

The bill will make it easier for veterans—especially veterans living with lifelong disabilities—to receive their earned clothing benefits which enables them to live with the dignity and comfort that they earned and so rightfully deserve.

Millions of veterans will live the rest of their lives with disabilities due to service-incurred injuries and physical impairments that resulted after they made the decision to protect our nation and safeguard our freedom.

Our courageous servicemembers have pledged that, on the battlefield, they will leave no soldier behind. In carrying out this sacred obligation, many have suffered life-altering injuries, including loss of limbs.

These injuries often result in loss of mobility or the need for a prosthetic which require spe-

cialized clothing and cause accelerated deterioration of standard garments.

In full appreciation of their devotion and the consequences they suffered from it, as a nation, let it be our pledge that when they return home, we leave no veteran behind.

H.R. 4772, the Mark O'Brien VA Clothing Allowance Improvement Act will alleviate these veterans' burden of needing to reapply for clothing benefits every year for our 1.9 million veterans with a service-connected disability.

I urge all of my colleagues to vote in favor of H.R. 4772, the Mark O'Brien VA Clothing Allowance Improvement Act.

Veterans have kept their promise to serve our nation; they have willingly risked their lives to protect the country we all love. We must now ensure that we keep our promises to our veterans.

Let us resolve together that we will provide returning veterans with the welcome, services, care, and compassion that they deserve.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 4772, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. GOOD of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

LANCE CORPORAL DANA CORNELL DARNELL OUTPATIENT CLINIC

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 5943) to designate the outpatient clinic of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Greenville, South Carolina, as the "Lance Corporal Dana Cornell Darnell Outpatient Clinic," as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 5943

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. DESIGNATION OF LANCE CORPORAL DANA CORNELL DARNELL VA CLINIC.

(a) DESIGNATION.—The outpatient clinic of the Department of Veterans Affairs in Greenville, South Carolina, shall after the date of the enactment of this Act be known and designated as the "Lance Corporal Dana Cornell Darnell VA Clinic".

(b) REFERENCES.—Any reference in a law, map, regulation, document, paper, or other record of the United States to the facility referred to in subsection (a) shall be deemed to be a reference to the "Lance Corporal Dana Cornell Darnell VA Clinic".

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.